

Tennessee Infrastructure In The News

August 4, 2008

A daily roundup of news stories and opinion pieces about Tennessee transportation, water and flood control infrastructure

For the full story, click on the link below the excerpt.

Study: Tennessee's highways rank No. 19 (Nashville Business Journal)

A new nationwide study by the Reason Foundation ranked Tennessee at No. 19 on a list of best highway systems in the nation. In last year's rankings, Tennessee ranked 20th overall. The state ranked first in rural interstate condition but 18th in urban interstate condition. Tennessee ranks 13th in deficient bridges --18.83 percent of the state's bridges are deemed structurally deficient or functionally obsolete. Tennessee is 37th in the nation in fatality rates. Neighboring Arkansas ranked 27th and Mississippi 38th among the states on best highway systems. The Reason Foundation's 17th Annual Report on the Performance of State Highway Systems measured the condition of all state-owned roads and highways from 1984 to 2006. It calculated the effectiveness and performance of each state in 12 different categories, including pavement condition, bridge condition, traffic fatalities, congestion, highway maintenance costs and administrative costs.

http://www.bizjournals.com/nashville/stories/2008/07/28/daily63.html?jst=b_in_hl

One in four deficient high-use bridges here (Chattanooga Times Free-Press/Sohn)

Five of Tennessee's 20 high-traffic, structurally deficient bridges are in Chattanooga, and four of them are downtown, according to an Associated Press analysis of recently released bridge inspection reports in the National Bridge Inventory. Fifth on the state's list of most-traveled structurally deficient bridges is the eastbound Interstate 24 ramp leading into Chattanooga to U.S. 127, state records show. The bridge carries 116,160 vehicles a day, according to state figures. "Just because a bridge is classified structurally deficient doesn't mean it's not safe," said Paul Degges, Tennessee Department of Transportation chief engineer. "There are 237 structurally deficient bridges in the state, and it would cost \$1.75 billion to replace them all. From a management standpoint, we don't need to replace them all."

<http://www.timesfreepress.com/news/2008/aug/01/tennessee-one-four-deficient-high-use-bridges-here/?local>

Gas prices drive motorists away from toll roads, shrink revenue (USA Today)

Record gas prices are prompting drivers to steer clear of some toll roads, bridges and tunnels, causing declines in the revenue that's used for repairs and maintenance. "It's killing us," says Parrish French, finance director for West Virginia's parkways authority. In June, revenue from passenger car tolls was down 7.3% from June 2007, and tolls paid by commercial drivers on the state's 88 miles of toll roads declined 4%. Transportation facilities in 34 states collect about \$8 billion in tolls a year, according to the International Bridge, Tunnel and Turnpike Association. Those facilities are feeling the effects of high gas prices and a switch to carpooling and mass transit: Americans drove 9.6 billion fewer miles in May 2008 than in May 2007, the Federal Highway Administration says. "Everyone's talking about increasing tolls" for the first time since 1981 to ensure that maintenance needs are met, French says. Cars pay \$3.75 to drive the full length of West Virginia's toll road; 18-wheel trucks pay \$12.75.

http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2008-07-30-Tolls_N.htm?loc=interstitialskip

Murfreesboro hoping FedEx delivers new distribution center (Nash. Biz Journal)

Southeastern Murfreesboro is in the running for a new FedEx Ground distribution hub that would bring hundreds of jobs to the area. Murfreesboro is one of several sites being considered for a Southeastern shipping hub to be opened as early as summer of 2010, confirms Allison Sobczak, a spokeswoman for FedEx Ground. FedEx Ground has also been considering shipping hubs in Kernersville, N.C. -- near Greensboro -- and Spartanburg, S.C. for a Southeastern hub, sources say. Sobczak would not confirm whether the Murfreesboro hub was in competition with the North Carolina and South Carolina sites. Sources familiar with the deal say FedEx has a contract on 138 acres of land on Joe B. Jackson Highway, less than 2,000 feet from the Interstate 24 interchange. The Corporate Woods partnership paid \$7.5 million for the land in 2006.
<http://nashville.bizjournals.com/nashville/stories/2008/07/28/daily43.html?surround=lfm>

Chattanooga hears report on rapid rail to Atlanta (AP)

A study for a proposed high-speed train route between Chattanooga and Atlanta is looking into 24 possible types of alignments for connecting the two cities. Chris Brady, principal of Commonwealth Research Associates LLC, told the Chattanooga City Council, "When we end up with this study, we will have a preferred alignment, a preferred technology, how to phase the different segments, where to start, and have hopefully a good idea of what the costs are." The 24 alignments ultimately will be narrowed to six three with magnetic levitation, or maglev, and three with very-high-speed rail, or VHS technology.
<http://www.accessnorthga.com/detail.php?n=211934&c=10>

Airport Runway Extension Stalls On Land Deal (Bristol Herald-Courier)

Tri-Cities Regional Airport officials are making slow progress in a 4-year-old land dispute that has kept them from expanding a secondary runway and building a perimeter road. The Airport Commission met with owners of Grande Harbor subdivision on Thursday to discuss the purchase of six lots that are worth a total of \$417,000, according to a recent appraisal. The airport needs the lots as a buffer zone for its secondary runway extension and for an access road around the facility so airport vehicles can traverse the property without crossing the runways, airport Executive Director Patrick Wilson said. The property is needed to extend three buffers for its runway protection zone, approach surface and runway safety area, which are mandated by the Federal Aviation Administration, he said.
http://www.tricitie.com/tri/news/local/article/tcra_making_slow_progress_in_land_dispute_for_runway_extension/12258/

Improving signs of the road (Chattanooga Times Free-Press/Davis)

Chattanooga must replace thousands of traffic signs over the next 10 years to comply with new federal standards to improve road safety and assist an aging population. The national mandate creates minimum standards for retroreflectivity, which "describes the ability of a surface to return light back to its source," according to the Federal Highway Administration. New signs will send more light from headlights back to drivers, making the signs much easier to see, said Doug Hecox, spokesman for the administration. "What we're trying to do is improve the road for everybody, but certainly for older drivers," Mr. Hecox said. "Most people (will) find that it's easier to drive at night." This federal mandate affects signs on every public road in America and also thoroughfares on private property, such as malls and gated communities, Mr. Hecox said. The new standard means signs have to be illuminated or have retroreflective sheeting, according to the Federal Highway Administration.
<http://www.timesfreepress.com/news/2008/aug/04/chattanooga-improving-signs-road/>

Bells Bend bridge questions need answers (Nashville City Paper)

Building a bridge is usually an act that conjures images of connection, even consensus. In the case of the proposed May Town Center on scenic Bells Bend, the need to build a bridge to connect the potential \$4 billion development to the rest of Nashville is doing the exact opposite. Residents and politicians whose neighborhoods sit far outside the peaceful confines of the Bend want to know how a bridge over the Cumberland River and an accompanying access road will impact their streets. Some members of Metro Council say they will not even consider the rest of the plan until bridge questions are answered...Current state law does not allow private/public partnerships for state roads, according to Tennessee Department of Transportation public information manager Julie Oaks. That means state law would potentially have to be amended to allow Giarratana and the May family that owns the potential MTC site to privately fund the bridge, which is estimated to cost tens of millions of dollars.

<http://www.nashvillecitypaper.com/news.php?viewStoryPrinter=61862>

Michigan: Comparable train project sputters (Livingston Daily)

While proponents of a commuter rail service connecting Livingston and Washtenaw counties gather this week to review a feasibility study, another similar project is sputtering along some 550 miles away. For almost two years, the Music City Star, the commuter rail service for the Nashville, Tenn., area, has fought financial woes, and has struggled to attract riders and get them to their final destinations. In many ways, the Tennessee line is similar to the proposed Howell-to-Ann Arbor line, down to the length, estimated costs, number of stops and projected ridership. Yet reality has been a rough ride for the Music City Star. Actual ridership started at only 550, far below projected numbers of more than 1,400. Daily ridership is still hovering in the 800s and has forced the system to embark on an expensive and unbudgeted campaign to attract new riders. The lower-than-projected ridership is the main reason why the Tennessee line has a \$2 million annual funding gap.

<http://www.livingstondaily.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080803/NEWS01/808030349/-1/NEWSFRONT2>

Minnesota: Minneapolis marks the day the bridge fell (Associated Press)

Memorial services recall those lost in I-35W collapse. It was another perfect summer day — so similar to and yet so different from that day a year ago when the Minneapolis freeway bridge fell. On Aug. 1, 2007, there was crashing and panic and disbelief and horror. On Friday, there were songs and doves and tears and hugs. And then silence, to remember the moment a year ago when the I-35W bridge collapsed into the Mississippi River during the evening rush hour, killing 13 people and injuring more than 140. Minnesotans came together for two memorial ceremonies in Minneapolis to mark the anniversary. Hundreds gathered in Gold Medal Park and marched to the wail of bagpipes to the Stone Arch Bridge, just up the Mississippi from the bridge that fell. A new bridge, under construction, already stands in its place. The red firetruck from Fire Station 11 — the first rescuer on the collapse scene — led the procession.

<http://www.tennessean.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080802/NEWS08/808020364/1025/news>

- Opinion -

Editorial: Keep up with bridge repairs (Leaf Chronicle)

When it comes to the overall condition of its bridges, Tennessee fares much better than other states — but it still must remain vigilant when it comes to safety. It's been a year since a bridge in

Minneapolis plunged into the Mississippi River. That prompted transportation officials across the nation to inspect their own bridges and resulted in 16 states closing bridges immediately, lowering weight limits on others or making repairs. The Federal Highway Administration reports that overall, 12 percent of the nations' bridges have a structurally deficient rating. That doesn't necessarily mean the bridge is unsafe, but it has deteriorated to the point of needing closer inspections or repair. Tennessee ranks below the national average in problem bridges. It reports just 4.7 percent of its bridges are structurally deficient. In the past year, the Tennessee Department of Transportation has spent \$32 million on 62 bridge repairs. That deficiency rate is lower than most states. Topping the list were Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and South Dakota — each reporting more than 20 percent structural deficiency. Arizona, Delaware and Florida had the best rates at 2 percent.

<http://www.theleafchronicle.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080802/OPINION01/808020311>

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